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SUBJECT: SHIA RELIGIOUS LEADERS SHARPLY CRITICIZE U.S.

REF: A. FBIS GMP 20060330534003

1B. FBIS GMP 20060330507001

1C. BAGHDAD 0095

Classified By: PolCouns Robert Ford, reason 1.4 (b) and (d)

11. (U) On March 28, the office of Ayatollah Sadiq al-Husayni al-Shirazi in Karbala issued a statement (ref a) condemning the Iraqi/US raid in the Ur neighborhood as a "heinous crime." Shirazi's statement also warned "the occupation forces" not to clash with the Shia majority to satisfy a Sunni Arab minority that harbors terrorists. (Comment: Shirazi comes from a distinguished family that helped in the revolt against the British in Iraq and Iran. He is close to the relatively minor Islamic Action Movement in Iraq. End Comment.)

12. (U) On March 26 (before the Ur neighborhood raid) the office of Ayatollah Muhammad al-Yaqubi (spiritual leader of the Fadhlila party) criticized the USG for denying the existence of a sectarian war in Iraq (ref b). Yacoubi pointed to the daily killings, attacks on holy shrines, and the displacement as evidence of this sectarian war. The statement called for political parties not to allow the participation of any side that does not renounce terrorism (NOTE: a not so subtle reference to the Sunni Arabs. END NOTE). It sharply criticized the new Iraqi National Security Council, the American Ambassador, and other Arab states. The statement concluded by demanding that the U.S. change its Ambassador, that the Iraqi government confront the elements of this sectarian war, and that the Shia nation organize itself into "committees and groups to defend themselves and their holy places."

13. (C) Shia independent politician Abbas al-Bayyati told Poloffs March 30 that blasts such as these reflect fear among many Shia that the U.S. is taking the Sunni Arabs' side against the Shia. Perceived pressure against the Shia Islamist Coalition's prime minister choice aggravates that perception, he said, as did the March 26 Ur neighborhood raid. U.S. statements about militias, sectarianism and perceived pressure on Jafari are stirring up the Shia public's ire. He urged the U.S. to measure its public statements carefully. PolCouns underlined that the U.S. respects the election results and has no preferred candidate for the prime minister. He reminded Bayyati that the U.S. was the biggest friend of the Shia in the ouster of Saddam Hussein, a point Bayyati readily acknowledged. (A Shia Islamist Coalition parliamentarian and Turcoman, Bayyati also strongly supports Jafari who he thinks would take a tougher line on the Kurds.)

14. (C) COMMENT: The public statements from Shirazi and Yacoubi represent some of the sharpest criticism from second-tier Shia religious figures since the Embassy opened. Shia political figures like Moqtada Sadr, Jawad

al-Maliki of Dawa, Abdel Aziz al-Hakim of SCIRI and Abdel Karim al-Anzi of Dawa-Tanzim launched their own direct and indirect blasts at the U.S. Some anger among the Shia was predictable (see ref c) as we encourage Sunni Arab participation in a political process that all sides still view as a zero-sum game. Our holding Shia militias responsible for human rights violations has surprised and angered the Shia community that feels it is the (main) victim of terror. Importantly, however, we maintain our access to key Shia political figures and some, like the Baghdad Governor and Baghdad Provincial Council chairman already are walking back a bit from their stern denunciations earlier this week. Most importantly, we are not hearing much public criticism from the most important Shia leader - Ayatollah Sistani. Blasts from his office will signal a more serious level of turbulence in our evolving relationship with the Shia here.

KHALILZAD